

LORD OF THE RINGS
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

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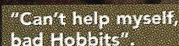
BY JASON BLAKE

ON A SUMMER'S DAY IN 1935, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was sitting by the window in Oxford University study, laboriously marking exam papers. Years later he recalled: "One of the candidates had mercifully left one of the pages with no writing on it (which is the best thing that can possibly happen to an examiner), and I wrote on it: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' Names always generate a story in my mind. Eventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like. But that's only the beginning."

The Lord of the Rings rapidly came to public notice when the BBC broadcast a drastically condensed radio adaptation in 12 episodes but the book didn't truly become a best-seller until *The Lord of the Rings* went into a pirated paperback version in 1965. Until then, it had only

However, Tolkien could only deplore those whose idea of a great trip was to ingest *The Lord of the Rings* and LSD simultaneously and in his final years, obsessed readers were causing problems for the elderly academic. Hundreds came to his house and until he died in 1973, Tolkien was fending off fans, demanding to know whether Frodo had succeeded or failed in the Quest, what was the preterite of Quenyan Lanta, or whether or not Balrogs had wings.

Although the success of Tolkien's epic led to a burgeoning, lucrative market in books, videos, role-playing fantasies, computer games, comic books and similarly-themed motion pictures, few in the entertainment industry considered the making of a



The road to Hobbiton.

A scene from The Hobbit movie showing a horse-drawn cart on a path leading to hobbit holes. The cart is pulled by a brown horse and carries a person wearing a pointed hat. The path is bordered by a stone wall, and the background features lush green hills and hobbit-style dwellings with round doors. A circular inset in the top right corner shows a close-up of a dark, patterned fabric.



faithful movie adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* possible — except Peter Jackson.

Known for his own ability to visually evoke the world of dreams — and nightmares — in films like *Heavenly Creatures* and *The Frighteners*, Jackson was a fan of Tolkien's works and had drawn inspiration from them in his formative years as a director. By the mid-1990s, Jackson believed that *The Lord of the Rings* was ripe for its first complete cinematic telling.

It seemed to be the right time. The book's thematic concerns were beginning to be played out in popular political culture. Frodo looks out across the landscape that he is to traverse and sees a panorama that is the culmination of all the evils of the modern world: "Everywhere he looked he saw the signs of war. The Misty Mountains were crawl-

ing like anthills: orcs were issuing out of a thousand holes. Under the boughs of Mirkwood there was a deadly strife of Elves and Men and fell beasts. The land of the Beornings was aflame; cloud was over Moria; smoke rose on the borders of Lorien." Tolkien's pessimism and scepticism was bound up with the spiritual collapse of the old order, and at a time when Globalisation was being trumpeted as the New Order on which contemporary society was to be based, his vision rang as prophecy.

Jackson also felt that visual effects technology had just about reached the point where it could tackle the legends and landscapes of which Tolkien dreamed — and could now do his fantastically detailed world justice: "From the beginning I wanted to make something that felt real," said Jackson. "Tolkien writes in a way that makes everything



The dark white wizard.



Agent Smith leads the charge.

"274 DAYS SHOOTING, 600 SCENES, 350 SETS, 4-MILLION FEET OF EXPOSED NEGATIVE"



We prefer the term "little people".

come alive, and we wanted to set that realistic feeling of an ancient world-come-to-life right away with the first film, then continue to build it as the story unravels."

Within that scope, Jackson aimed to bring front and centre the themes of good versus evil, nature versus industry, and friendship versus the forces of corruption. "All the major themes are introduced in *The Fellowship of the Ring*," said Jackson. "The most obvious one is good versus evil, but this story is also about how friendship endures and overcomes even in a world of tremendous upheaval and change. We really tried to make these themes part of the fabric of the first film."

Jackson knew he could not translate every single line of Tolkien's 1000-page epic trilogy into

imagery, and that certain changes to the saga would need to be made. However, he committed himself to remaining faithful to how he had responded to Tolkien's work as just one of the millions of captivated readers. "When there was a question about how to proceed, I would just shut my eyes and imagine the characters in my head, the same way a million readers around the world have shut their eyes and seen these books come alive as personal movies in their heads," said Jackson. "From doing that, I felt I already knew the characters and the scenes before we started shooting."

MIDDLE EARTH DOWN UNDER

Jackson also embraced another decision in the early days of the trilogy's development: to shoot all three films at once. Using the same cast and crew — with considerable implications for cost savings — the mammoth undertaking, five years in the planning, would be filmed over 15 months and involve over 90 speaking parts. The three films entailed 274 days of principal photography, encompass 600 scenes, 350 sets and more than 4 million feet of exposed negative. Only with the advent of advanced satellite communications, could Jackson direct filming in up to three separate locations around the country, feeding instructions to a field director from his base and viewing the footage as it happened.

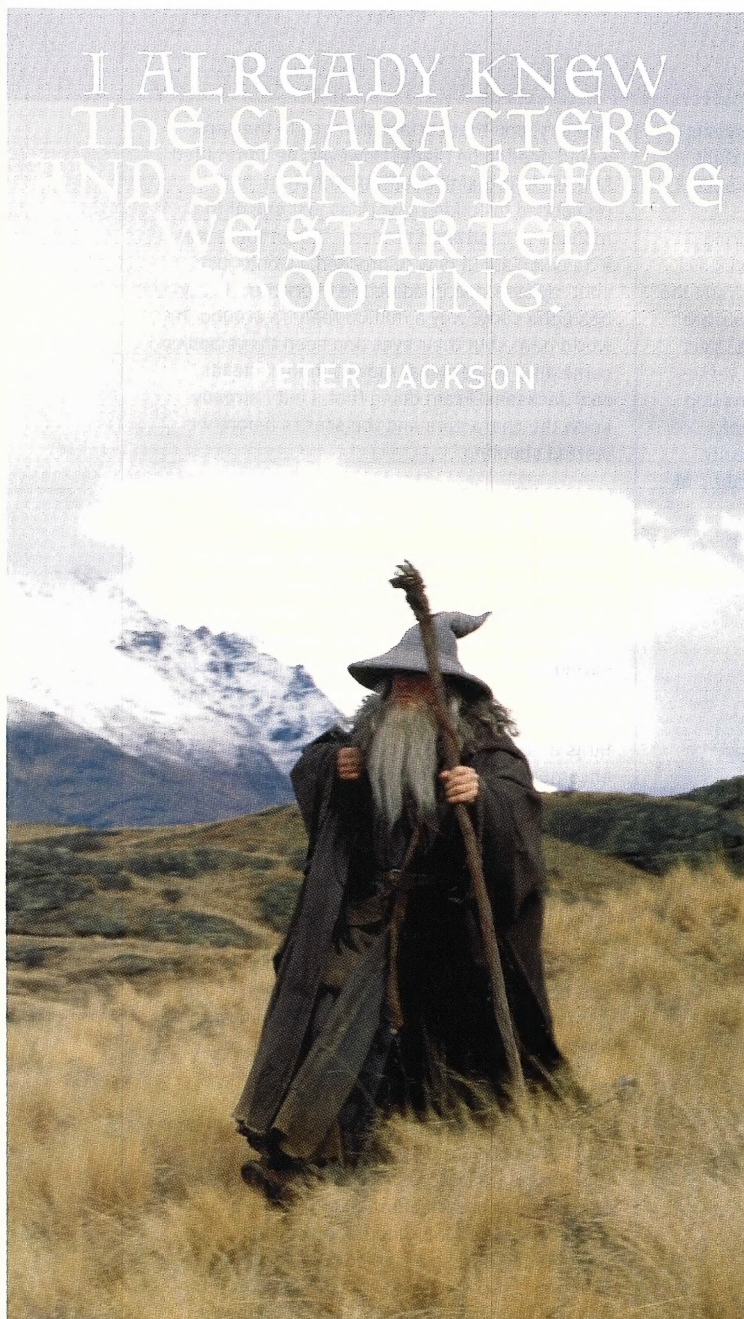
However, before a single frame could be shot, another major contributor to the making of *The Lord of the Rings* would have to play their part — the New Zealand Government.

Despite the fact that Jackson was himself a New Zealander, the principle reason for recreating Middle Earth down under was not so much the extraordinary scenic opportunities that the country affords to filmmakers, but the generous tax breaks afforded to the film's producers, New Line Cinema. Anxious to promote the film as a sign of New Zealand's economic "recovery" and a destination for international investment, the government allowed





Meet the Orcs.



New Line to defray one-third of its \$NZ600-million production costs against tax. New Line was also able to cut costs even further by engaging the NZ Defence Forces. Army personnel were used in a variety of capacities, both behind and in front of the cameras. As manual labourers, they laid 5,000 cubic metres of soil, ploughed fields, tended a vegetable garden, built sets and were used as extras in the battle scenes. For all this the NZ Defence Force received, according to a report released by Defence Minister Mark Burton, a one-off payment of \$205,666 — or \$20 per day for each person worked, around \$2.45 an hour.

New Line spokesman Michael Lynn told the Los Angeles Times in December 2000 that thanks to the tax breaks, pre-release distribution deals and sale of associated merchandising rights, New Line would only be risking \$US20 million on each of the three movies.

THE QUEST FOR REALITY

Even more instrumental in the creation of the reality of Middle Earth however was new Zealand's premiere physical effects house, WETA Limited. Under the direction of supervisor Richard Taylor and Tania Rodger, WETA technicians created Middle Earth's entire physical reality, from the interiors of Hobbit holes to the heights of Mount Doom.

But before WETA could get to work, the filmmakers turned to the two men who knew Tolkien's universe best: conceptual artists Alan Lee and John Howe, who illustrated the Harper Collins editions of *The Lord of the Rings*. Between them, they sketched seminal images of the cultures, creatures, buildings and landscapes that make up Hobbiton, Rivendell, Mordor and Mount Doom. The sketches were incorporated into storyboards, scale models and full-scale sets under the aegis of production designer Grant Major. In addition to full-sized sets, the production widely used miniature sets — models so detailed that the slightly larger ones became known as "bigatures".

Wherever possible, real materials (as opposed to polystyrene) were used to create the separate worlds. For the Hobbiton exterior location, Major



Riders on the storm.



sought an area that featured real English oak trees. "We found a piece of farmland that had a rough geography of what we were looking for," said Major in an interview with American Cinematographer. "We cut roads and recontoured the Party Field, and we built more hills for the Hobbit homes, as well as a main access road. A planting program was then undertaken, with grass, hedgerows, gardens and an orchard sown 12 months before shooting was scheduled to commence." For the Elvish kingdom of Rivendell, Major utilised and emphasised natural shapes and textures. Building structures out of oak, some four storeys high, most of the Rivendell sets were made on location. "We used fairly traditional materials such as wood and shingles and tried to make Rivendell look a little bit worn."

Another big consideration in bringing *The Lord of the Rings* to the screen was the well-known fact that the average height of a Hobbit is just 3'6". To create this illusion onscreen, Jackson and cinematographer Andrew Lesnie utilised a variety of techniques, such as scale doubles (short or tall stand-ins who doubled for the Hobbits or other characters), scale sets, forced perspective and motion control. The large scale doubles, who were at least 7' tall, were often employed for situations involving over-the-shoulder shots looking down at a Hobbit who was talking to a taller character, such as Gandalf or Aragorn. Small scale doubles stood in for the Hobbits during wide shots where the actors' faces were not visible.

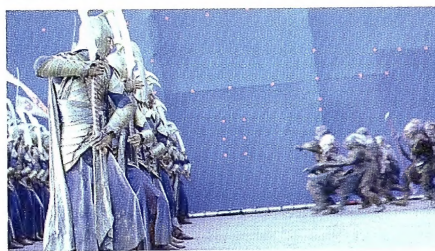
BREAKING DIGITAL GROUND: THE VISUAL EFFECTS

Despite the copious use of "real" materials, it's doubtful that *The Lord of the Rings* could have been transferred to the screen without the enormous advances of computer graphics in recent years. However, the same philosophy applied: "I wanted the monsters to feel real right down to the dirt under the fingernails of a Cave Troll," said Jackson.

For example, developments in computer software enabled the creation of battle scenes in which thousands of computer-generated creatures act and inter-act as individual beings, rather than programmed masses with a limited range of actions. WETA Digital also invested in a massive database that stored every single frame shot in the making of *The Lord of the Rings* in a digital library that can be instantly accessed, analysed and cross-referenced. This means that every single element in the trilogy can be subject to digital manipulation, from landscapes to mood lighting to Hobbits and horses.

Visual effects supervisor Jim Rygiel, speaking to American Cinematographer said: "It was nice because they could look for the cream of the crop. But when you get the cream of the crop, you also get the cream of the crop's ego. With so many experts on hand, everyone had a different solution to the problems that the production posed." When asked

Constructing a battle.



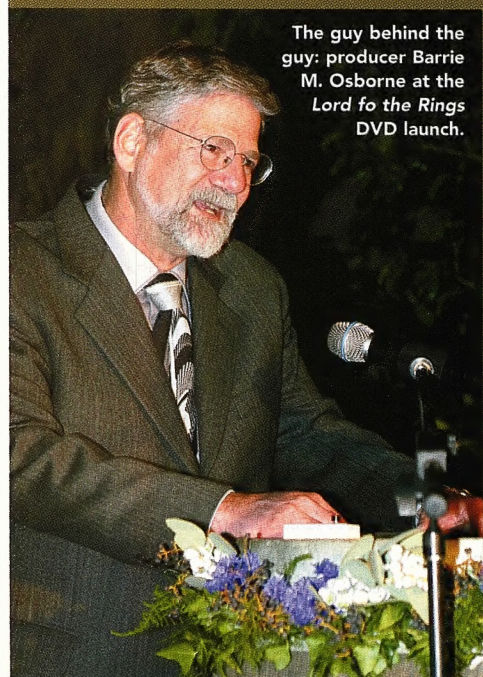
about working with Jackson, Rygiel was uncharacteristically cautious: "I always have to think about that. He's great. The best way to describe him is — it's kind of that knife edge of insanity." ●

The LORDS OF THE RINGS

Producer **BARRIE M. OSBORNE** and Executive Producer **MARK ORDESKY**, two of the main men behind *The Lord of the Rings'* journey to the big screen, sat down with DVD Now to talk about releasing the DVDs, and what they've got planned for the fantasy epic's future.



The guy behind the guy: producer Barrie M. Osborne at the *Lord of the Rings* DVD launch.



DVD Now: What was it in Peter Jackson's filmography that convinced you guys he could take on a production of this magnitude?

Ordesky: There was nothing in his filmography. But we didn't do it on the basis of his filmography. I'd known Peter personally since 1987. It's conventional Hollywood thinking to say 'oh, if they haven't done this before they'll never be able to do it now.' And that's the kind of conventional Hollywood thinking that leads to bland vanilla films. There were some studios, who shall go unnamed, who didn't even bother to take the meeting when Peter came to Los Angeles. Can you imagine?

DVD Now: What's your favourite film of his?

Ordesky: Excluding *Lord of the Rings*?

DVD Now: Excluding *Lord of the Rings*.

Osborne: For me *Heavenly Creatures*.

Ordesky: I think for sheer quality of filmmaking that's probably true. I have a passion for *Bad Taste* just because it's the first one, it's the first thing I ever saw. I tried to buy it, you know, for a hundred thousand dollars when I was in another company and I was told I was insane.

DVD Now: How difficult was it to convince new line, considering they put just about everything they had on the line?

Ordesky: Surprisingly, relative to the investment, it was not difficult. Even though it was water-cooler fodder in Hollywood for many, many months and years that this was a foolhardy endeavour, once the first film was seen as a great success it became retroactively the most visionary business decision in modern filmmaking history because we had two sequels in the can at an unbelievably economical price.

Osborne: But I think I would encourage anyone who reads this article to go out and make only one movie at once.

Ordesky: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME! I used to be six feet tall, I'm gonna be hobbit size by the time it's done.

DVD Now: So there's a rough-cut of the second *Lord of the Rings* film?

Ordesky: Oh there's more than a rough-cut, there's a fine cut. There's been a fine cut for some time. There's fine cuts of all three.

DVD Now: Which of the three do you like best?

Ordesky: Oh it's not fair to say. All you can say with certainty is they get better and they get bigger. The thing is people think of film one as this gigantic epic, and they have no idea. Film one is like an indie movie compared to film two. And film three is even more humongous than film two.

DVD Now: Why are you waiting a year between releases of the films?

Ordesky: With these films it's a simple thing because the nature of the post-production schedule was such that we couldn't release them any earlier than a year apart anyway. And also things happen in terms of the video window and the DVD window and the pay TV window. Things start to cannibalise each other because you suddenly are theatrically releasing a movie at the same time that film one is in the video store.

Osborne: I was an advocate of trying to do six months.

Ordesky: We were going to do summer-Christmas-summer [US], there was a thought, and then we looked at the post schedule and we were like ARE YOU INSANE?

Osborne: I'm glad I lost that argument. We would have been dead.

Ordesky: But it works. I kinda like the idea of every Christmas you're going to be with Lord of the Rings and every summer you're going to have the video, DVD, pay TV, etc.

DVD Now: Given the Rings success are there any plans for The Hobbit?

Ordesky: The Hobbit rights are actually frozen in a complicated legal situation between New Line and United Artists, so for the time being there is no ability to make a hobbit movie.

DVD Now: So can you describe the difference between the first DVD version and second DVD version?

Osborne: The first version, the August release, is the theatrical experience. You'll see the movie that you saw in the theatre and you'll be able to own it or rent it, have it in your home. I must also say that the DVD quality, the quality of the images is impeccable. We scanned in our negatives so that most of the negative is digital negative. On film two we're going to do the entire film as a direct transfer from actual digital information. The November DVD is an extended cut of the movie. Both cuts are Peter's cuts and Peter stands behind both of them, he doesn't have a preference for one or the other. The extended cut is something that you probably wouldn't sit through in a theatre. It's long and the pacing might be slow. But it's really great because it rounds out the characters so you get to see all of this background and understand the back-story of a lot of the characters.

Ordesky: Peter feels strongly that the way a theatrical audience watches a movie and the

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Smooth operator: Exec Producer Mark Ordesky

way a home audience watches a movie are just entirely different experiences. And therefore I think if you watched the three and a half hour November release at home you would not be conscious of it being "too long or too much detail". But that same exact film in the theatre would be a different experience.

DVD Now: Do you think there's any possibility in years to come of this second version making it into cinemas?

Ordesky: It is possible that down the road one could create the feature film versions of the extended cut. Actually our fantasy is that after film three is released you could take the extended cut of film one, film two, film three and put them onto film and watch them in a theatre, which would be very cool.

DVD Now: Do you guys have a preference?

Osborne: No. I mean this sincerely, I actually like both of them because they're fully realised pieces of art. What we did that's unusual is half an hour of material and it's not like outtakes. These scenes are all fully integrated in.

Ordesky: Yeah, you won't have a consciousness when you watch it. Unless you have a real deep knowledge of the theatrical version, you can't tell 'oh, there's one of the new scenes', it just flows. Howard Shore's score flows.

DVD Now: Is there a favourite anecdote from the shoot?

B: Well, there's one. Early on we were filming and we had to get to the south island. We were originally going to take a plane, but Sean Bean hated flying, so he decided he would drive down with one of our production guys. I think Orlando Bloom was following in another car. So Sean's driving down south and there's a landslide in front of his car. He turned around and there's a landslide back there. They were stuck in this tiny little town. So they convinced someone to let them take a room in their house, went out, bought a bunch of pasta and ended up cooking a good bowl of pasta for this person.

M: Sean Bean and Orlando Bloom will come to your house, and make pasta!

B: They had a great evening in this town and we needed them for filming the next day. So, despite Sean's best efforts to avoid flying we sent a helicopter in to pluck him out in the middle of a rainstorm and bring him back.

The FIRST RING

As DVD Now recently revealed, Roadshow are releasing *LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring* in two installments. Here's a sneak peak of what the first, August 6th release will contain.

DISC ONE: (178 minutes)

- Widescreen theatrical release version of the film.
- Dolby Digital Ex 5.1 Surround Sound.
- Stereo Surround Sound
- English Subtitles for the hearing impaired.

DISC TWO: (Over two hours of additional content)

- Exclusive 10-minute behind-the-scenes preview of *The Two Towers*.
- Three in-depth programs that reveal the secrets behind the production of this epic adventure, including:
 - Houghton Mifflin Welcomes You to Middle-earth
 - The Quest for the Ring — a Fox TV Special
 - A Passage to Middle-earth — a Sci-Fi Channel Special
- Fifteen featurettes originally created for lordoftherings.net which explore the locales and cultures of Middle-earth and includes interviews with cast members
 - Finding Hobbiton
 - Hobbiton Comes Alive
 - Believing the World of Bree
 - Ringwraiths: The Fallen Kings
 - Languages of Middle Earth
 - Two Wizards
 - Music of Middle Earth
 - Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortenson, Orlando Bloom, Cate Blanchett, Liv Tyler and Ian McKellen
- Weathertop: The Windy Hill
- Enya "May It Be" music video
- Peter Jackson — Making *The Two Towers*
- Preview of Electronic Arts' video game, *The Two Towers*
- An inside look at the Special Extended Edition of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

DVD-ROM CONTENT

Exclusive on-line content